



## **A STUDY ON PARENTAL VIEW ON THE EMERGENCE OF SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The current qualitative study aimed to understand the parental view on the emergence of sexual and gender identity in the Indian context. A total of 16 participants were interviewed in this qualitative review, 8 male and 8 female. Search engines like Google Scholar were used to find literature in the field. While the topic has not been explored much, some research points to the fact that a positive parental support and their openness towards the topic of sexuality and gender expression facilitates the child's psychosocial development. Additionally, the children will develop a healthier outlook on these issues and have a clear sense of self (Eser & Celikoz, 2009). After completing the interviews, it was observed that

there was a significant gap in the knowledge of parents surrounding the issues of LGBTQ+ and non-cisgenders. Most parents held a negative and hostile attitude towards the community which was also reflected in their practice.

**Keywords:** *Sexual identity, Gender identity, Parental View, Intersectionality, Discrimination*

## INTRODUCTION

### SEXUAL IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The American Psychological Association (2012) defined sexual orientation as “the sex of those to whom one is sexually and/or romantically attracted to.” While there are various categories within the concept of sexual orientation (LGBTQ+), it does not always appear in such rigid categorisations, rather viewed as a continuum i.e., something that may slowly and gradually change over time. John Money (1955), a controversial and innovative sexologist, further stated that sexual identity is “oneself perception of their sexual orientation.” Money was one of the first prominent figures to address the topic of different sexual orientations, a term that he coined.

### GENDER IDENTITY

‘Sex is a biological concept, while gender is a social construct.’ The terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are often interchangeably used. But contrary to popular belief, these are two distinct topics. Sex is assigned at birth based on your genitalia. Person born with a penis is a male while a person born with a vagina is a female. Intersex persons are those who are born with reproductive organs that do not fit the male or female criteria. Intersex is not a disease or a condition. Gender, on the other hand, is a social and cultural construct which a person is assigned at the time of birth. Gender identity is how an individual views themselves and how they conceptualise their gender. Gender expression is how you

express that identity. This may reflect in how you dress or behave. One may fit societal expectations with this expression or go against them.

Along with the gender label comes a set of roles and responsibilities that are expected out of an individual from society. Earlier, only 2 genders were recognised i.e. men and women. But presently, over 70 genders are recognised worldwide. The predominant genders are as follows:

**Cisgender:** Individuals whose gender identity are congruent with the sex they were assigned at birth. An individual is “cisgender” if the sex is female, and they also identify as a woman.

**Agender:** Individuals who choose not to identify with any gender or remain neutral.

**Transgender:** When an individual identifies with a gender that is incongruent with the assigned biological sex. If a female identifies with a gender other than a girl/woman, they will identify as transgendered. Transgenders, depending on resource availability, often undergo sex change surgeries that help them lead a more open life wherein their gender identity is aligned better with their physical being.

**Nonbinary:** It is somewhat of an umbrella term for individuals who do not fit into the traditional concepts of male or female. They may be a mix of both genders, neither of them nor, as a different gender entirely.

**Genderqueer:** These individuals reject gender distinctions and embrace the continuum nature of gender.

**Genderfluid:** Their gender identity remains fluid i.e. they experience different genders at different moments of their lives.

**Bigender:** This is when a person identifies themselves with both the genders and may switch from

time to time.

**Demiboy:** This means partially identifying as a boy or a man but not entirely.

**Demigirl:** This means partially identifying as a girl or a woman but not entirely.

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITY IN INDIA**

In the rich tapestry of Indian society, the intricacies of sexual and gender identity are woven through a multitude of cultural, familial, social, legal, and political threads. At the heart of this complex tapestry lie the deeply ingrained cultural and religious beliefs that permeate every aspect of life. With India's diverse array of cultures and religious traditions, attitudes towards gender and sexuality vary widely, ranging from conservative adherence to traditional gender roles to more progressive acceptance of diversity and inclusion.

Beyond the family unit, social and community attitudes also exert considerable influence. Communities, whether defined by geographic proximity, shared interests, or cultural heritage, often hold collective beliefs and values that either embrace or stigmatise non-normative identities. Peer groups, educational institutions, workplaces, and media representations further contribute to the social construction of gender and sexuality, shaping individual perceptions and experiences.

## **DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBTQ+ AND GENDERQUEERS**

Discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals and those who identify as genderqueer remains a pressing societal issue, fraught with prejudice and injustice. This discrimination manifests in various forms, from overt acts of violence and hate speech to more subtle forms of marginalisation and exclusion. LGBTQ+ individuals often face systemic discrimination in areas such as employment, housing, healthcare, and education, depriving them of equal opportunities and basic human rights.

Moreover, the stigma surrounding non-conforming gender identities exacerbates the challenges faced by genderqueer individuals, who are frequently subjected to invalidation, erasure, and discrimination within both LGBTQ+ and broader society. This pervasive discrimination not only harms the well-being and safety of LGBTQ+ and genderqueer individuals but also undermines the principles of equality and dignity for all.

Addressing discrimination against LGBTQ+ and genderqueer individuals requires concerted efforts to challenge societal norms, promote awareness and acceptance, and advocate for legal protections and policies that uphold the rights and dignity of every individual, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

## **CONCEPT OF INTERSECTIONALITY IN INDIA**

Intersectionality, within the context of gender and sexual identity in India, is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the interconnectedness of various social identities and the ways in which they intersect to shape individuals' experiences of discrimination, privilege, and marginalisation. In India, where societal structures are deeply influenced by factors such as caste, class, religion, and region, intersectionality adds layers of complexity to understandings of gender and sexual identity.

### **Rationale of the study**

The current qualitative study aimed to explore parental perspectives on the emergence of sexual and gender identity among children and adolescents in the Indian context. Despite limited research in this area, existing studies suggest that parental support and openness positively impact a child's psychosocial development regarding sexuality and gender. However, preliminary findings indicate a significant knowledge gap and negative attitudes among parents towards LGBTQ+ individuals and non-cisgender identities.

By conducting in-depth interviews with 16 participants (8 male, 8 female), this study seeks to provide insights into the factors shaping parental attitudes and perceptions. It also aims to highlight the need for educational interventions and awareness campaigns to promote acceptance and understanding within Indian families. This research not only contributes to academic literature but also informs policymakers and mental health professionals about the importance of addressing parental attitudes in supporting children exploring their sexual and gender identities.

### **Research Gap**

There exists a significant research gap in this field. Current studies fail to highlight how parental view can impact their children's sexual and gender identity especially in Indian context. India has a collectivistic culture which highlights the importance of family and societal perception. Moreover, researchers have not presented solutions on how parental view can be improved to allow young adults to fully express their sexual and gender identity.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to understand parental views on the emerging issues of sexual and gender identity.

### **Sample**

16 parents in the age range of 40-60 (8 males and 8 females) were interviewed. All the participants had a minimum of Bachelor's qualification and resided in urban areas belonging to the upper middle class. The participants had a maximum of 2 children. All belonged to Delhi NCR region.

### **Measure**

Knowledge, Attitude and Practise; KAP scale was devised to measure the components of parental views

namely, knowledge, attitude, and practice.

### Analysis of Data

#### Result

**Table 1**

*Knowledge, attitude, and practice of parents*

| S.no.               | Questions                                                                                                              | Percentage of positive responses |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>1. Knowledge</b> |                                                                                                                        |                                  |
|                     | A) Can you define the concept of sexual and gender identity?                                                           | 75                               |
|                     | B) Can you distinguish between sexual and gender identity?                                                             | 75                               |
|                     | C) Can you describe the various sexual and gender identities?                                                          | 87.75                            |
| <b>2. Attitude</b>  |                                                                                                                        |                                  |
|                     | A) Do you believe the LGBTQ community and non-cisgenders have a fundamental disadvantage in different spheres of life? | 80.75                            |
|                     | B) Do you think you have created a safe space for your child to openly express their sexual and gender identity?       | 100                              |
|                     | C) Do you believe that the government should devise better ways of representing sexual and gender minorities?          | 69.75                            |
| <b>3. Practice</b>  |                                                                                                                        |                                  |
|                     | A) Do you actively participate in discussion relating to issues surrounding sexual and gender identity?                | 63.5                             |

|                                                                                                                                                                           |       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| B) Do you try to stay updated on the various developments in the field? (introduction of new identities, incorporating more inclusive language, policies, laws and so on) | 93.75 |
| C) Have you had an open conversation with your child regarding the matter?                                                                                                | 43.75 |

### Discussion of Result

The qualitative research aimed to explore parental views on sexual and gender identity issues through 16 interviews with parents over 40. Findings revealed limited knowledge and understanding among participants, with 75% possessing rudimentary knowledge, often confusing sexual and gender identity terms. Only 25% could clearly differentiate between sexual and gender identity.

Attitudes towards LGBTQ+ issues varied, with 80% expressing hostile views, viewing the community as overly sensitive. However, 100% believed they had created safe spaces for their children to express their identities, despite discomfort discussing these topics openly.

Regarding government intervention, only 5 of 16 participants supported policies benefiting LGBTQ+ individuals. In practice, less than 40% engaged in discussions on these topics, and none stayed updated on developments. Most parents admitted discomfort discussing these issues with their children due to lack of knowledge or perceived complexity.

Overall, the study highlights a gap between parental knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning sexual and gender identity issues.

### Conclusion

This qualitative exploratory research highlights certain gaps that exist in various aspects of the parental view. The KAP scale was used to meticulously assess how much the parents knew about the

topic, whether they had a supportive and open-minded attitude towards LGBTQ+ and non-cisgenders and how their knowledge and attitude translated onto their behaviour or practice. It was noted that there is a significant knowledge gap in terms of what exactly sexual and gender identity are. They had limited and a bit inaccurate idea about SI and GI, with many of the participants also struggling to differentiate between these two concepts. Majority of the participants displayed a hostile and negative attitude towards LGBTQ+ and non-cisgenders. There were several misconceptions relating to the community along with a certain resistance to be receptive to the changing times. They labelled these individuals as ‘unnecessarily defensive’ and ‘overly sensitive attention seekers’ and found these issues inappropriate to talk about.

Surprisingly enough, despite this animosity towards the community, the parents opined that their children can openly talk their views on this issue and express their sexual and gender identity however way they feel comfortable. Few participants also acknowledged the fact that while they have created a safe space for their children, the children themselves do not take the initiative to talk about these issues. When it comes to government intervention in these issues, many of them were against the same as they believed that it was not needed and may even prove to be detrimental as it goes against the ‘values of the country’ because it challenges the traditional approach to romantic/sexual relationships and gender. Some believed policy formulation for the community would mean that they are receiving a somewhat special treatment. As for their behaviour, most of the parents did not feel comfortable discussing this issue in a social setting publicly as they deemed it as ‘inappropriate.’ They also tended to avoid this discussion with their children because of age-appropriacy and lack of proper knowledge.

This research sheds light on the importance of comprehensive educational programs that can fill in the gaps in knowledge of the parents as well as resolve myths and misconceptions. There is a growing need of addressing the negative attitudes of the parents through systematic desensitisation which will further encourage parents to have honest conversations with their child regarding these issues which will significantly and positively contribute towards a healthy psychosocial development.

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